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at 866

For the staff of MACMILLAN INC. and subsidiaries at 866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. **March 1981**

Best Evidence

The making of a best-seller

There was no drama—no triumphant shouts, no pleased exhausted sighs—for the staff of Macmillan's General Books Division when they opened the Book Review section of *The New York Times* on Sunday, February 15, and saw that their book, *BEST EVIDENCE: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy,* had hit the best-seller list, number 12 in non-fiction.

They knew it already; the *Times'* book section is printed well in advance of the rest of the Sunday paper and the best-seller list is made known within the book trade a good ten days before it's published.

In fact, many people in General Books were sure even before the list was released on February 5 that *Best Evidence* would be there. In the weeks after the book was published officially on January 13, sales had been so strong, it simply *had* to be on the list. Lesser best-seller lists had it; *Publishers Weekly* made it number 13 in non-fiction, it was number 10 on *Time* magazine's list, it was climbing the lists compiled by B. Dalton and WaldenBooks, the huge chain stores whose lists are considered the most accurate in the business.

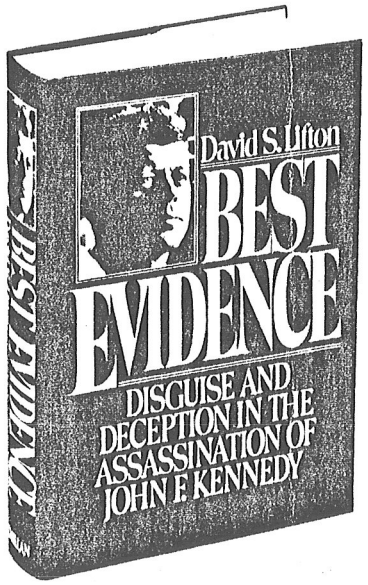
Public Recognition

No, the pleasure for General Books' people on February 15 rested upon public recognition that they and author David Lifton had been successful in their effort to overcome a nearly universal reflex-

As the new year and publication day approached, Litewka was leading a carefully coordinated editorial, production, marketing, and sales campaign that he regarded as a model for future efforts, a campaign that might have invested more time and effort into *Best Evidence* than any other book in Macmillan's recent trade publishing history.

Intensity

The campaign mirrored in intensity, if not in length of time, the effort of David Lifton (see sidebar) who had devoted essentially all his



adult life to trying to resolve the contradictions in the public record about the assassination.

"When his agent brought the book to me," Jeremiah Kaplan said, "Lifton's personal story appealed to me as much as the book itself. It astonished me how the case made such an impact upon a young graduate student and how he spent so many years getting to the bottom of it.

"The information in the book must be aired, of course, but we're not a newspaper. The question for us is, will people want to read it, and it's Lifton's story that sets the book

An interview with chief financial officer Bob Holster

This is a tough time of year for Macmillan's financial staff members.

At the same time that they're compiling and reacting to the first reports of results in the new year, Macmillan's financial experts are busy closing the books on the year gone by, pressing to complete the complex and detailed summaries for the Annual Report to Shareholders and the Form 10K Report to the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington.

The year-end closing pressure doesn't ease until the end of March and until then the lights in many offices burn late in the evening and into the weekends.

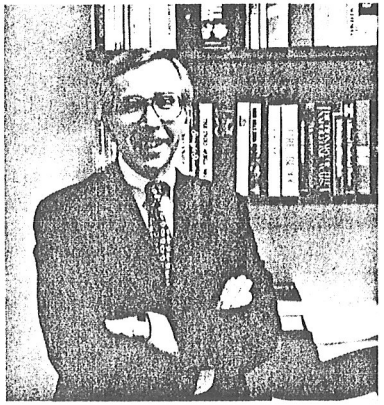
The 1980 closing effort at Macmillan is the first headed by Robert Holster, promoted to vice president and chief financial officer of the corporation just last November, but it's far from a novel experience for him. He'd seen the closing process, like all the facets of corporate financial work, from the outside as an auditor for a public accounting firm and from the inside in a succession of increasingly responsible financial posts with Pfizer, Inc. and Revlon, Inc.

Best Evidence

Massive length, tight schedule, author's close involvement mark publishing effort

David Lifton delivered a 2,000-page manuscript to Macmillan in the spring of 1980 and that by itself was a big problem. The manuscipt was too long, even without the 24 pages of photographs, 50 line drawings, a chronology, footnotes, source notes, and two indices that would accompany the text. It would have to be cut to a manageable length.

But that was only the first problem General Books' editorial and production people would face with



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF George Walsh.

Best Evidence: The very complex, detailed argument Lifton presented demanded unusual attention from the book's editors. Lifton was continuing his research and would be adding new material practically right up to the day the finished camera copy was sent to the printer in November; that was a problem for everyone, but especially for the editorial and production staff. Many more people than usual were involved in reading the proofs and checking Lifton's facts—mainly lawyers and associates of Lifton who was involved; it was a marvelous effort."

Rayanna Simons was the first person in General Books to confront the huge manuscript. An early booster of the book within the house, Simons line-edited it and helped to cut it.

"Technically, it wasn't a difficult book to line-edit," said first reader Simons, "but it was enormously time-consuming. The clarity was strong, it just needed some smoothness, some polish. The big problem was cutting it."

Layers of Evidence

Lifton's case depends upon layers of minutely detailed evidence that accumulate to make a convincing argument, so there was a danger of breaking a vital link in the chain in the interest of publishing a book of manageable, saleable size. Through countless meetings Simons, Walsh, Lifton, and Lifton's associates struggled with the length, finally cutting it to 1400 typewritten pages, including the late addition of new material.

"Lifton was extremely cooperative about this book and not to talk

reasons for every mark we made. He was amazingly even-tempered and extremely meticulous; he never winged it. Our concerns became his concerns."

Printer's Deadline

As the printer's deadline approached, General Books' people—manufacturing was handled by director Jim Lepper and manager Rusty Gutwillig, design of the text and binding by Helen Mills, design of the jacket by art director Jackie Merri Meyer—found themselves managing a process that seemed more like newspaper production than book production, moving copy a few pages at a time.

But when the project was finished, its secrecy and intensity seemed to stick in their minds as much as the practical difficulties.

"We were all warned to be secretive about this book and not to talk

LINE EDITOR Rayanna Simons.

MAC PUB President Jeremiah Kaplan signed Best Evidence.

about it outside the office," said Gutwillig. "The proofs were always locked up at the end of the day and we made special security arrangements with our typesetters and printers. When he needed to talk to us about the book, Lifton had a way of coming to your door, looking around, closing it, and speaking very softly. It was all very dramatic."

In the end, the publishing people met almost every deadline they'd set, and aced the big one.

"We beat the bound-book deadline by two days," said Jim Lepper.

"I really enjoyed the intensity of this project," Lorraine Alexander Veach said. "There was almost a feeling of loss when it was over."

The author and the book

David Lifton was a doctoral candidate at UCLA graduate school and a computer engineer with the principal contractor for the Apollo space program on November 21, 1963, the day President Kennedy was assassinated. At first he avoided the press and television coverage of the assassina-

"It always looked like the end was just around the corner," he says, "and I knew my life would be seriously incomplete if this book was not published."

Lifton's book, *Best Evidence*, is both a painstakingly researched account of the events immediately following

overcome a nearly universal reflex-ive visceral reaction to the book: "Oh, no! Not another crazy Kennedy book. They never sell."

That effort had begun with Mac Pub President Jeremiah Kaplan, who signed *Best Evidence* nearly three years ago. It was taken up by General Books President Albert Litewka when he took the lengthy manuscript home with him on a summer weekend last year and found himself anchored to his chair reading it. It spread to the people who edited the book and saw it through an unusually complex production process. And it commanded (and continues to command) almost unprecedented attention from General Books' marketing and sales staff.

Albert Litewka

apart from the other books on the assassination. I thought it would sell."

For a detailed look at how *Best Evidence* was published and sold, see page 2.

Hectic Schedule

Late in 1980, shortly before the year-end closing crunch began in earnest, Holster took a moment out from an impossibly hectic schedule

(continued on page 8, column 1)

A visit to Berlitz headquarters, Princeton's "little U.N."

The world headquarters of The Berlitz Schools of Languages, Inc. is housed in a non-descript complex of office buildings in Princeton, New Jersey, a development that somehow seems too common-looking to be the home of such an uncommon organization.

A small airport across the road from the low-lying complex provides a nice symbolic touch, connecting the headquarters to the 23 nations where Berlitz maintains 215 schools. But overall, the setting appears inadequate to the glamorous, fabulously successful organization that was founded 103 years ago and became a part of Macmillan, Inc. in 1966.

Talk to Berlitz' people at Princeton, though, and different adjectives come to mind—unpretentious instead of common, economical instead of inadequate. They're an unpretentious, plain-spoken group and they don't care much about appearances.

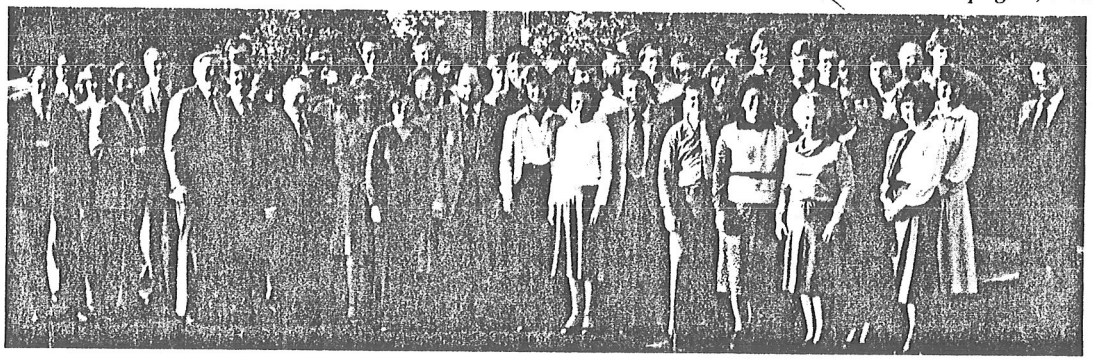
Talk to Raphael Alberola, the Casablanca-born president of Berlitz, a man with a sardonic sense of humor, and you suspect he appreciates more than just the economical location of his headquarters, that he takes ironic pleasure in working in the midst of a major academic center. The failure of academia to accept the Berlitz Method of teaching languages, a failure sometimes accompanied by contemptuous criticism, has contributed to Berlitz' success. If students received better language instruction during their formal education, perhaps there wouldn't be so great a need for the service Berlitz offers.

"The Berlitz Method is our biggest asset," Alberola says simply. "We teach people how to *think* in a new language. The traditional academic approach teaches how to *translate*, a method that's too slow and introduces errors."

The Berlitz Method, of course, discards rote memorization of vocabulary and the rules of grammar and focuses on simply speaking the language under study. From the first moment of the first class, a student neither hears nor speaks anything but the target language. Grammar and vocabulary (plus the first steps in knowledge of the culture where the language is spoken) are acquired gradually and naturally as the student progresses through a course.

The organization Alberola heads is spread around the globe, with major concentrations of schools in western Europe, North America, Latin America, and Japan. About three quarters of all Berlitz lessons are given overseas, with English

(continued on page 4, column 1)



ON A MILD FEBRUARY DAY, the Berlitz staff at Princeton posed outside their offices.

SRO

THE DEBUT performance of works by G. Schirmer's Barry O'Neal, Chris James, and Jerry Ordansky, here posing during rehearsal at Carnegie Recital Hall, was sold out March 3. See page 8.

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volved in reading the proofs and checking Lifton's facts—mainly lawyers and associates of Lifton—and that complicated the copy editors' job as they shepherded the book through galley and page proofs. Everybody sweated over the schedule, which was tighter than it might have been because Albert Litewka was insistent that *Best Evidence* be finished and shipped before the end of the year.

COPY EDITORS Mary Donchez (left) and Lorraine Alexander Veach flanking copy supervisor Lorraine Steurer.

Simultaneous Stages

Normally, a new book moves through the publishing process in reasonably sequential steps. Once a manuscript is edited it moves in orderly fashion from design to typeset galley proofs to page proofs and finally to the finished camera copy for the printer. *Best Evidence* moved through many of the stages simultaneously.

MANUFACTURING AND DESIGN: art director Jackie Meyer, designer Helen Mills, production director Jim Lepper, and manager Rusty Gutwillig.

"No book I have ever been associated with has received the concentrated attention within the house that we gave *Best Evidence*," said editor-in-chief George Walsh, who took the book onto his own list and supervised the publishing process. "I can't say enough about everyone tive," Walsh said. "He threw himself into the production process with the same commitment he gave to his research."

To many of the people who worked on *Best Evidence*, Lifton's unusually close involvement in the process was a notable element in an effort that had many memorable features.

"It seemed he'd taken up residence here," said copy editor Lorraine Alexander Veach, who divided responsibility for the manuscript with Mary Donchez. Copy supervisor Lorraine Steurer had early on decided to assign two copy editors to the book because of its size, complexity, and the tight schedule. "Often he'd come in late in the afternoon and we'd find him still here when we came in the next morning. He wanted to know the

was assassinated. At first he avoided the press and television coverage of the assassination because of "an aversion to public displays of grief."

About a year later, Lifton attended a lecture on the assassination given by conspiracy theorist Mark Lane and came away impressed by the contradictory information that had been released about President Kennedy's wounds. But it wasn't until May, 1965,

David Lifton

when he bought a set of the 26-volume Warren Commission Report, that he began to become deeply involved in investigating the assassination. Within two years, unable to concentrate on work or studies, he had severed his connection with job and school to concentrate on his investigation.

Lifton thought he would spend six months or so completing his research, and living on his savings. "If anyone had told me then that I would spend fifteen years of my life studying the events of that fatal weekend in Dallas," he said, "I would have thought that insane."

From 1967 until December 1978 when he signed his contract with Macmillan, Lifton survived on $2,000-$3,000 a year earned as a lecturer and film consultant, supplemented by family support.

dence, is both a painstakingly researched account of the events immediately following the assassination and an account of his remarkable 15-year odyssey.

Key elements in the case Lifton presents—a minutely detailed chain of evidence that's all but impossible to summarize briefly—include these:

There were major contradictions between the observations of the President's wounds reported by the doctors at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas who first treated the President and the official findings of the autopsy conducted by doctors at the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland a few hours after the assassination (the Dallas doctors thought the President was shot from the front, but the Bethesda doctors said it was from behind; there were wide differences in the size of the wounds reported by the two sets of doctors). And new witnesses Lifton found gave him information that indicated that two separate ambulances, each with a different coffin supposedly containing the President's body, arrived at Bethesda at different times before the autopsy.

Lifton believes the President's body was stolen for a time between Dallas and Bethesda and was forensically altered to change the evidence of the direction of the wounds and support a single assassin theory. The alterations, Lifton says, extracted bullets from inside the body and changed the evidence concerning the number and direction of the shots.

Best Evidence

Publicity, advance sale, audio-visuals highlight marketing

There were two particularly unusual features to the sales and marketing campaign for *Best Evidence*—one external and one internal.

The external feature was the extraordinary secrecy that surrounded the publication of the book. Three key factors contributed to the decision to keep it under wraps: lawyers were checking the manuscript right up to the last moment

PUBLICIST Jeanine Johnson and director Dianne Rowe.

before it went to the printer; there was a danger the book might be discredited in the press on the basis of isolated pieces of information taken out of context; and it seemed, finally, to be a good marketing strategy to surround the book with an air of secrecy and expectancy.

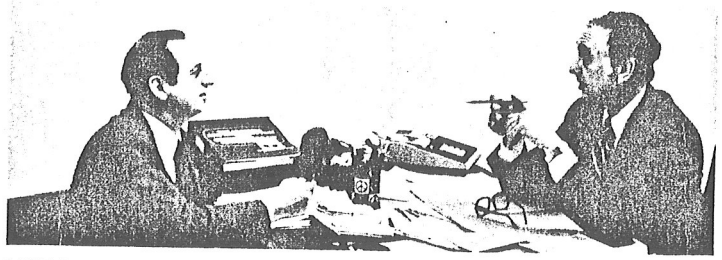
Existence Well-Known

The existence of the book was well-known—General Books' people were talking about it obliquely within the trade as long ago as the American Booksellers Association convention last May—but no advance copies were made available to anyone. This called for unusual creativity from people who ordinarily would spread advance proofs of an important new book liberally

diate, concentrated burst of attention in the media, backed by a coordinated advertising campaign. It rested upon a firm foundation of advance orders built up by the sales force. And it featured an element unique in book promotion—the creation of a slide and tape presentation that offered a glimpse into the book without betraying too much information, and later a 22-minute film that featured Lifton's key witnesses and provided a more detailed look at their evidence.

Underlying the campaign was the knowledge that *Best Evidence* likely would either be a best-seller or a bust.

"This is a controversial book and difficult to present," said marketing director Charlie Hayward, who joined the General Books team in December. "People want to walk away from it for political reasons or because they're jaded over the whole subject. There have been plenty of books on the assassination but none has really been taken seriously nor sold well. If we could get it onto the best-seller lists, particularly the *Times*' list, then people



SALES manager Norman Adell with director Bob Gales.

would have to pay attention to it."

Slide Presentation

office in Stamford, Connecticut, as well as Brentano's.

The initial advance quota set for the sales force—all 13 of them—was 50,000 copies. The final advance sale totals reached 56,000 copies, 10% above a quota that was higher than anyone thought it could be in the first place.

The 22-minute film proved especially useful for publicity director Rowe and publicist Jeanine Johnson, assigned to the book because of her extensive Washington contacts. The logistically complex media push they worked out rested upon a deceptively simple assumption.

"Lifton's thesis and the new evidence he turned up were news," Rowe said, "and had to be treated as such. This wasn't routine book publicity, this was a news-break."

Rowe and Johnson set up a press conference for January 13 in Washington, and zealously guarded the book until its official release. Only selected media saw it earlier—*Time, Newsweek,* the *Today* show, *Good Morning America, 20/20, 60 Minutes,* and the CBS *Evening News* were shown advance copies the week before under a strict embargo for January 12.

Time Spread

On January 12, *Time* ran a two-page spread on *Best Evidence* in its "The Nation" section, calling Lifton's thesis preposterous while pointing out that virtually no fact

time they were finished, Lifton was booked for at least four interviews or appearances in each city, with telephone interviews scheduled in between. Later, six cities were added to the tour, and Lifton re-visited Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, and Cleveland. In the end he spent the better part of two full months on the road.

"It was a perfect example of how one break leads to another when you get off to a good start," said Johnson.

By now, major and minor media across the country have covered *Best Evidence,* including *The New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* the *Tomorrow* show, National Public Radio, Cable News Network, *Time, Good Morning America,* and more.

"I was in Los Angeles the day after Lifton appeared on the *Tomorrow* show," Bob Gales said, "and the booksellers were saying it was like a faucet had been turned on."

Advertising Support

The tour was supported by the advertising campaign.

"We concentrated upon the three weeks immediately after publication," Charlie Hayward said. "We did major newspaper advertising in 10 cities and radio spots in three key markets, spread it as much as we could, and coordinated it with the tour."

By February 2, the 75,000-copy first print run was sold out, 25,000 more were ordered, and the sales staff was busy handling re-orders. In early March, a third printing of 17,500 copies was ordered.

Now the marketing people are concentrating on keeping the momentum going. Hayward is coordinating a follow-up advertising campaign capitalizing on *Best Evidence*'s best-seller status, concentrating on radio spots. The book has risen as high as fourth on the

copies were made available to anyone. This called for unusual creativity from people who ordinarily would spread advance proofs of an important new book liberally through the trade.

The internal feature concerned the extent of the planning and effort that went into the campaign itself.

"There's a dual purpose to this campaign," said Albert Litewka, who just celebrated his first anniversary as head of General Books. "Obviously we're working to sell as many copies of the book as we can. But we're also working to set a new standard here for imaginative, creative, carefully planned, and systematically executed publishing and marketing of all our books.

"We had detailed plans for *Best Evidence* drawn up six months or more before we actively began to promote it and we met at least once a week beginning early last summer to monitor our progress and adjust to developments."

The team that participated in those meetings (editorial people were closely involved too; many said they'd never seen such good coordination before) is a mixture of veterans with Macmillan and several key new staff members who came to General Books after Litewka took over. There's a pertinent analogy that can be drawn here to a basketball team that trades for a couple of starting players in midseason, struggles for a while as the new teammates discover how best to combine their talents, and then hits its stride and begins to drive for the playoffs.

For General Books, the *Best Evidence* campaign might be considered the playoffs' first championship round.

Marketing Keys

The marketing effort keyed upon a publicity campaign planned by Dianne Rowe that followed the prepublication secrecy with an immediate

SALES manager Norman Adell with director Bob Gales.

would have to pay attention to it."

Slide Presentation

The slide presentation came into play early.

"We showed the slides to the major book clubs during the summer," Litewka said, "and the upshot was the Book-of-the-Month Club took *Best Evidence* as a featured alternate for January."

The BOMC news helped fuel the efforts of the sales staff headed by director Bob Gales (another Litewka acquisition) and regional manager Norman Adell.

"BOMC helped give the book credibility with our buyers," said Gales, who made good use of the slide presentation, not least with his own staff, "but it was the credibility our sales force has with our customers that really sold it.

"We first started working on *Best Evidence* after our sales conference early in May, when George and Albert presented it to the staff. But the bulk of the advance sales came after our miniconference in August when we showed the reps the slide presentation and they began to concentrate on the winter books."

Adell said the sales force devoted a lot of time to breaking down the typical "Oh no!" reaction to the book. Buyers resisted it.

"Frankly, I was skeptical too at the beginning," Adell said, "and so was the rest of the force. But Litewka and Walsh sold us on it and the slide show clinched it. The sales force really put their reputations on the line over this book and they did a great job."

Important Buyers

Gales and Litewka showed the slide presentation to all the important buyers they could get their hands on, including the key people at B. Dalton's headquarters in Minneapolis and WaldenBooks central "The Nation" section, calling Lifton's thesis preposterous while pointing out that virtually no fact in the book wasn't supported by the public record of the assassination or by Lifton's interviews ("Lifton has turned up intriguing new evidence," *Time* said). The same day, Lifton appeared on *Good Morning America*, showing excerpts from the slide presentation and the film.

On January 13, while Lifton was speaking to the press conference in Washington and again showing the film, copies of the book and an extensive press kit were delivered to major reviewers, news people, and talent coordinators in 18 cities around the country. Coverage in the media that day was strong, and it built in the days to come.

On January 15 Lifton departed from Washington, slides and film in hand, for a tour of the 18 cities, knowing where he would be each day for the next few weeks, but not who he would be talking to.

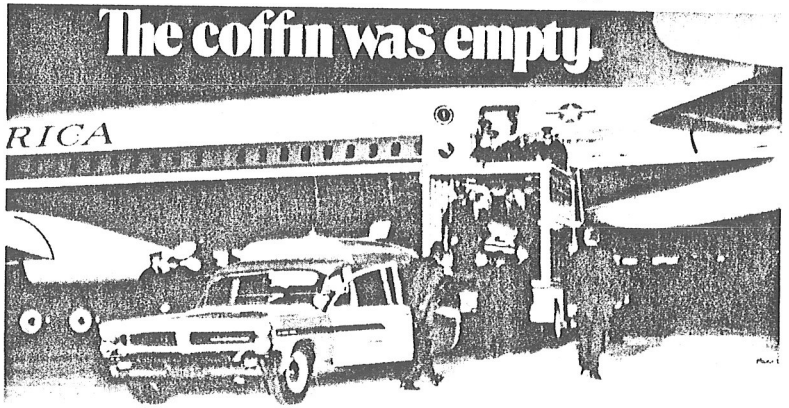
Booking the Tour

Rowe and Johnson split the cities between them and contacted the major newspaper, television stations, and radio programs. By the dinating a follow-up advertising campaign capitalizing on *Best Evidence*'s best-seller status, concentrating on radio spots. The book has risen as high as fourth on the *Times*' list, and is still in the top ten on the other major lists around the country.

MARKETING director Charlie Hayward.

It even found a companion on one national list the week of March 2. Macmillan's *Reagan, the Man, the President* was number nine on *Time* Magazine's list that week, while *Best Evidence* was number ten.

"That was an interesting contrast in books," Albert Litewka said. "We bought the Reagan book right after the election, the text was already on computer tape, and we published and distributed it in three weeks. Next to it on the list was *Best Evidence*, the product of 15 years of struggle."



NEWSPAPER ADS featured this photo and headline, along with an extensive description of the book.

Photo by UPI